



# CONGRESSMAN HENRY A. WAXMAN NEWS

2444 RAYBURN H.O.B  
8425 WEST 3rd STREET

WASHINGTON, D.C. 20515  
LOS ANGELES, CALIF. 90048

202-225-3976  
213-651-1040

CAPITOL SPOTLIGHT  
by HENRY A. WAXMAN  
(D-Los Angeles)

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## "RELIGIOUS FREEDOM IN SAUDI ARABIA"

Eight years ago I had a bitter personal taste of the attitudes of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia towards Jews. I was a member of an official Congressional delegation scheduled to visit the Saudi capitol of Riyadh. We were all given forms asking for a statement from our clergymen attesting to our religious affiliation. I promptly brought my form to the cantor of our synagogue (the rabbi was on vacation). The cantor solemnly attested to the fact that I am a member of the Judaic faith. The Saudi embassy refused me permission to enter the country. They did not conceal the reason: Jews were not allowed to visit Saudi Arabia--not even U.S. congressmen on official business.

The rude rebuff made me more determined than ever to join my peers. I was granted admission after high-level State Department officials reminded the Saudis of how easily Henry Kissinger gained admittance when the Saudi government wanted him as their guest.

Recent news from Saudi Arabia indicates that Christians in that country are suffering unbelievably harsh oppression. Only a few years ago, King Khaled had agreed to allow Christians a small degree of religious freedom. Apparently, Islamic "holy men" have convinced the King that the old policies were not restrictive enough.

Readers please note: There are virtually no Saudi Christians. There is no Christian minority in Saudi Arabia with numerical or political significance. Christians in Saudi Arabia are almost without exception employees of American and Western European companies working under contracts for the Saudi government.

Under rules promulgated this past summer, Christians are prohibited from conducting any public worship service or Bible study of any sort. They are also prohibited from reading any Christian religious material in the presence of a Muslim. Prayer meetings in private homes must hold attendance to no more than ten people.

All Christian books, records, and cassettes have been banned. It is forbidden to play even such universally admired music as Hendel's Messiah.

Christians are spied on by vigilante groups called "morals police". To show the lengths to which "morals police" are willing to go, they reported an Englishman who shouted, "Jesus Christ!" at a motorist who

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had cut in front of him. He insisted that this expletive was a case of profanity rather than religious expression. The Saudi government decided otherwise. He was ordered to leave the country within 24 hours.

For years, we have heard from Arabists in the State Department and from pro-Arab journalists that the Saudis are "moderates, Western-oriented, doing their best to bring their desert Kingdom into the 20th Century." The facts of life in Saudi Arabia indicate precisely the opposite.

The Saudi Royal Family is bent on enforcing the most extreme and rigid form of Islam. The government is terrified not only of Christianity, but of every Western philosophical concept which promotes individual rights. We have no more in common with the Saudis than we do with the Iranians. We certainly should not deal with them under the illusion that we share a common ethical outlook.

A ranking official of an airline which flies to Saudi Arabia has stated flatly, "There is less religious freedom here than there is in Communist countries." The old saying that the level of human rights in a country can quickly be judged how Jews are treated is on the mark once again. Whereever members of one faith are categorically rejected, members of other faiths will sooner or later fall victims to the same mentality of hate.

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